

Thoughts on Storytelling as a Healing Art

By Nancy Mellon

For many years as a teacher and a psychotherapist, I have worked with storytelling as a healing art in family life. Storytelling can help children and their caretakers cope with these overwhelmingly difficult times. Every adult who is a role model is now feeling an immense burden of responsibility but parents, teachers, and other caretakers can tap into wise and healing creative forces. Children need creative imagination because *imagination is the language of childhood*. When an imaginative story comes to them directly from the loving heart and soul of an adult, they are satisfied as in no other way. Stories warm the hearts of children and adults alike, allowing both to grapple creatively with emotions. They awaken buried wisdom and in the midst of turmoil and exhaustion, they bring profound refreshment. Storytelling transforms daily life with children. A true healing art, it comes naturally through the spirit of Love without great training, to help both adults and children open to wisdom within and beyond us. I have worked with thousands of parents from around the world and have had many experiences of how this art changes lives. My new book, *Storytelling with Children*, focuses on parenting. It presents encouraging and inspiring anecdotes and simple, practical techniques and guidelines for adults of all ages to become the storytelling companions children need. When children are confused and families distressed I know of no better way through the darkness than with storytelling. This intimate, ancient household art can align us with the spiritual sources that may bring us through this terrible time. I received this story from a mother today. Her six-year old daughter told her dream shortly after the attacks of September 11th. "I was on a ship and it crashed. There were a lot of skeletons around and then some people came who were trying to kill us." Her mother, who before attending my Storytelling School had never told a story, said: "That sounds like a story. It just isn't finished yet." They sat up in bed, snuggled close, and then...

"Once upon a time there were many people on a big strong ship. It sailed out into the ocean with great hope and courage. It sailed on very well. But one day a storm came. The sky darkened and the ocean swelled higher and higher, and then plunged down low. The sea tossed the boat up and down. It rained, and thundered, and the winds howled. The people on the boat looked out but couldn't see what was ahead of them. Or what was behind them. They were lost and they tossed here and there until they crashed into a hard rock. The boat broke apart. The people swam and tried to hold onto bits and pieces of the boat. They tried to help each other, but the stormy sea kept them going under and coming back up and going under and coming back up until the people also crashed into the rock. And there they saw skeletons. And there they saw a band of pirates who came toward them with daggers in their hands. The good people of the ship feared that the pirates would kill them. This was the island of bones. The pirates wanted more bones to build their island bigger. They wanted to kill the good people and have more and more skeletons.

"At last there came another ship, a Ship that needed no water. It sailed right out of the stormy sky. Sailing the Ship was an enormous Angel with tremendous power. With a bolt of lightning, he stunned the pirates so they could kill no more. Then he gathered the people of the ship. Some of them he brought to Heaven so that they could be made whole again. And others he brought to different places all over the world. He gave them the power of Peace. And so strongly did they carry it, that when other people saw them, they became peaceful too, they felt it right in the middle of their hearts. It was the peace that can live in the heart of hearts and is helpful for all men and all women and all children whenever they are troubled and whenever they are not."

Her child was satisfied with that. In the morning, she had a very good day playing with friends.... .